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SUBJECT: TAJIK PRESIDENTIAL ADVISOR RAHMATULLOYEV MEETS DAS  
FEIGENBAUM

REF: Dushanbe 1587

CLASSIFIED BY: Tom Hushek, Charge d'Affaires, U.S. Embassy,  
Dushanbe, State.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: Presidential Advisor on Foreign Policy Erkin Rahmatulloyev waxed philosophical on Central Asia's history and role in U.S. policy and the challenges facing his country, but agreed with Deputy Assistant Secretary Evan Feigenbaum that the U.S. and Tajik governments share the same priorities and concerns about regional integration and stability. Democracy, he added, will not happen in Tajikistan overnight, and the Tajik government fears instability. But there are indications that the Tajik mentality is changing step by step. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) In an 80 minute meeting August 21, Rahmatulloyev told DAS Feigenbaum he was very pleased with the current bilateral relationship, particularly because during the 1990s the United States had given only "episodic" attention to Tajikistan and its neighbors. Now, the relationship reached across many sectors and cooperation was clearly growing stronger. DAS Feigenbaum agreed but offered a slightly different characterization of early U.S. policy in the region, noting it had not been "episodic" since the US had maintained a consistent interest in the region since 1991. But it might have seemed one-dimensional - for example, focused mainly on opening new embassies and denuclearization in the early 1990s, and later on responding to the Global War on Terror. Many observers in the 1990s had argued that U.S. policy was simply a function of geo-strategic competition with Russia and China, reducing Central Asian states to the objects of their struggle. Feigenbaum noted we have now reached a new moment where the United States is pursuing a genuinely multi-dimensional relationship with Tajikistan and its neighbors and where the Central Asian countries themselves are

at the center of our regional policy.

#### DEMOCRACY TAKES TIME

¶3. (C) Rahmatulloyev observed that the U.S. vision for the region almost mirrored the Tajik government's priorities, although he suspected that the United States sometimes feels that democracy and human rights were not shared priorities in the region. Unlike neighboring countries, "We don't have that allergy" to democracy, he joked. However, he cautioned that the "mentality" of the Tajik population was not ready for a dramatic democratic transition that could lead to "undesirable consequences." "One reason for the Civil War was that political demonstrators tore down a Lenin statue before the population was ready for such a change. This led directly to confrontation." Five years later, he noted the government changed the name of Lenin district to Sughd district, with nary a complaint from the public.

¶4. (C) It was all about gradual timing of new ideas, he opined. "For a long time we lived in a society of single-mindedness, but now we are used to multiple opinions. We cannot come to this in a day." Feigenbaum noted that democracy was by no means a uniquely American idea and many countries had developed their own democratic traditions. He said Washington would like to see Tajikistan develop more democratic processes but in a manner that would be unique, not a carbon-copy of the United States. He noted the great deal of interest in Tajikistan's November presidential election.

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#### ISLAMIC RENAISSANCE PARTY

¶5. (C) Rahmatulloyev noted that neighboring countries were not always pleased Tajikistan allowed an Islamic-based political party to operate legally. Rahmatulloyev called the existence of the Islamic Renaissance Party (IRPT) a compromise between Islamic and secular movements, noting that it has reduced the basis for fundamentalism in the country. He also suggested that the IRPT's legal status should demonstrate to neighboring countries that not all Islam is radical and political.

¶6. (C) Rahmatulloyev doubted that acting Party Chairman Muhiddin Kabiri would run for president in November, noting that his candidacy could reduce his political prestige. (Reftel A) "It would be catastrophic for him if the party nominates him!" said Rahmatulloyev. There is no alternative to President Rahmonov, and any opposition candidate will receive such a small percentage of the vote, he will seem politically insignificant and fade away. "Look at Usmonov!" he said, referring to the last candidate who opposed Rahmonov. "He got two percent of the vote, and now he's gone." When the Peace Agreement was signed in 1998, added Rahmatulloyev, the opposition received 30 percent of government positions, representing its approximate share of support among the population. Now, Rahmatulloyev estimated the support for any opposition to President Rahmonov to be much lower.

#### NEXT STEPS

¶17. (C) In response to DAS Feigenbaum's question about what else or new the United States could do in the region, Rahmatulloyev suggested stimulating regional development. Referring to the UNDP's recently published Human Development Report, Rahmatulloyev noted that Central Asian countries would experience a 50 percent growth in GDP just by reducing tariffs and trade barriers. "Tajikistan supports this policy." He called the U.S.-funded Bridge at Nizhniy Pyanj a regional, not bilateral project, for the transport connections it would facilitate. "When we proposed building that bridge, you were still friends with Uzbekistan, and the Uzbeks urged us to refuse, because there was already a bridge across the Pyanj. Now look how important our bridge is." The United States' presence in the region is a catalyst for development, he said.

¶18. (C) The United States' role should be to facilitate regional integration, Rahmatulloyev said, helping Central Asia diplomatically and economically. He gave the example of Tajikistan's excess summer electricity, noting that until 1996, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan swapped excess power. The Uzbeks abandoned the agreement for political reasons, and chose instead to expend resources on domestically produced power at "three times the price of Tajik electricity. It overturned economic logic." DAS Feigenbaum noted the region's interdependence, and regretted the political obstacles to realizing the integration opportunities. The United States, he said, wants to be a facilitator, a convener in helping to realize precisely these opportunities.

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¶19. (C) Rahmatulloyev reported he was writing a book that addressed Tajikistan's traditional problems and new challenges. Traditional issues included hydropower and water sharing, transport and communication links, regional relations--"issues we inherited" from the Soviets. New problems meant radical Islam, narcotrafficking, and terrorism. "U.S. policy must take into account these realities," he advised. DAS Feigenbaum repeated that we shared many of the same concerns. He noted that we would like to see more U.S. businesses opening in Tajikistan, but the current investment climate remained risky for many. Enhanced economic rule of law could help to attract more private investors at this exciting time. Ultimately, an American Chamber of Commerce would help demonstrate that Tajikistan had assimilated international commercial practices.

"THE BEST BUREAUCRACY IN THE WORLD"

¶10. (C) Rahmatulloyev complained that U.S. bureaucracy -- "the best bureaucracy in the world" -- led to long gaps between agreements and implementation. He noted the Chinese supported three major infrastructure projects, signing the official agreements in June. Within ten days, they had sent machinery and the projects had started. "As the United States intensifies its economic ties, it would be beneficial if it could move faster," he subtly counseled, particularly in energy, where Afghanistan and Pakistan have a growing demand for electricity.

ONE LAST THING~ ABOUT THAT DEBT RELIEF

¶11. (C) Rahmatulloyev observed that since independence, the United States had given Tajikistan almost one billion dollars in

assistance. "We are most grateful," he said. "But I have a little question." He noted that Tajikistan had requested several times the United States to forgive the \$17 million in debt for food purchases, and added that President Rahmonov had asked about this issue. Other highly-indebted poor countries received debt write-offs, the IMF forgave almost \$100 million in Tajikistan debt, and Pakistan has also forgiven \$30 million. "We don't understand, but we attribute this to your U.S. bureaucracy." DAS Feigenbaum pledged to look into the matter.

COMMENT:

¶12. (C) Rahmatulloyev had a very analytical bird's eye view of regional policy, and a realistic perspective on the U.S. role in the region. However, his complaints about U.S. bureaucracy reflect what many in the Tajik government think: the U.S. is all talk, and slow action. Particularly on infrastructure projects, like Sangtuda-I hydropower station, the south-north highway and transmission lines, the Russians and Chinese have, in Tajik eyes, moved quickly to deliver on promises. Rahmatulloyev did not acknowledge that often the Tajik bureaucracy holds up movement on projects, such as the Ministry of Energy's month-long period to consider the AES contract for a feasibility

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study on transmission lines to Afghanistan. He, like many in the Tajik leadership, welcomes the idea of more U.S. investment and involvement in the region, but may not entirely understand to what extent that would entail transparency and enhanced rule of law. END COMMENT.

¶13. (U) DAS Feigenbaum cleared this cable.  
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